

FRESHMAN

URBAN LEGEND OR YOUR DAUNTING FATE?

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Few times in a person's life bring as many changes as the first year in college. Some of these changes are exciting; and include heightened independence, living away from home and a multitude of new experiences. Others, however, stir fear. At the top of the freshmen fears list is the proverbial "freshman 15," the excess weight freshmen are notorious for gaining.

The good news is this: much of the "freshman 15" is an urban myth and one that's often exaggerated. In fact, freshmen that do gain weight rarely gain more than two to ten pounds.

One reason for these weight changes is the fact that adolescence lasts from around age 12 to 20. This means you're still growing. You may grow a bit taller and your weight may increase slightly. There is nothing wrong or unhealthy about that.

Lifestyle changes may contribute to weight changes as well. Increased stress, lack of sleep, reduction in physical activity and changes in eating and drinking habits are usual culprits. If you were an athlete in high school and aren't in college, your body may change. If you went from Mom or Dad's amazing home-cooked meals to restaurant food, pizza and French fries, or if you've

jumped onto the alcohol-induced party wagon (this is a big one), you'll likely see some changes.

The best action for students to take is to first allow themselves some wiggle room. Modest weight changes are healthy and normal. Next, make a plan to incorporate healthy lifestyle habits from the get-go, and not just to avoid weight gain, but to feel and function better. Find a physical activity you enjoy and approach it moderately—three to five active hours per week is plenty. Exercise is a great stress reliever, keeps your body healthy and strong, prevents unhealthy weight gain and contributes to another important factor for freshmen—SLEEP.

Make sleep a priority. Experts suggest that college students require eight to ten hours of sleep, yet are incredibly lacking. Proper rest helps keep energy and GPA's up. Sleep also reduces overeating and allows your body to remain healthy and strong.

How students react to their fears regarding weight is of particular concern. When these fears intensify, many attempt to counteract them by crash dieting or exercising excessively. These are harmful behaviors that detract from student's lives, health and emotional well-being. Avoid these scenarios and don't be afraid to seek help from a counselor when you feel overwhelmed. You aren't in college to harm yourself; you're there to grow and thrive.

The start to anything requires mastering the basics. Babies sleep, eat and breathe long before they walk, talk or run. Freshman year is similar. You are babies in the college world with the unique opportunity to build a strong platform on which to build your adult lives. Self-care is the work you must do in order to accomplish this. When your focus shifts positively your weight concerns and other worries fall to the wayside, allowing for you the healthy, happy college experience you deserve.

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